

Faith and Courage to Move Forward

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Welcome to fall semester 2020. I hope you are doing well and staying healthy! To say that we are living in interesting times would be an understatement. We have all had our challenges to face with a myriad of individual experiences. And now here you are, trying to bring normalcy to a new school year that is certainly far from normal.

We all have stories to tell about our experiences in these unusual times, and hopefully we are, in some way, recording them so that we will remember and be able to share with others the difficult times as well as the extraordinary times we have experienced. I am grateful for scriptures, journals, photos, letters, and all things that help us remember and share. They can be sources of inspiration and encouragement, as well as examples for us.

I am not a great letter writer, but I enjoy receiving letters and keeping them so that I can reread them from time to time. As a matter of fact, I have a pen pal. Her name is Liv. Liv is a young woman from Harrisburg, North Carolina. She was eleven years old when we met. Shortly after we met, she

wrote me a letter, and we have been exchanging letters ever since. Liv is now sixteen. Recently I received a thick envelope from her. Inside was a letter and a stack of different-sized cutout paper hearts. On each paper heart was a quote, scripture, or inspirational message that Liv said had helped her through this difficult pandemic period.

Liv wrote:

Back when everything was initially shut down because of the virus, I went through a hard time. I felt a lot of despair and sadness, and I worried that the world, which is already pretty evil and dark, was going somewhere even worse. I felt hopeless. But I tried to submit to Heavenly Father. I pleaded with Him to give me hope and light in the darkness. And as a result, I had multiple unforgettable spiritual experiences that filled me with empowerment, courage, and faith. My well of hope, which had been emptied, was filled back up by the love of God. . . . I [am] so grateful to God for giving me this brightness of hope.

Peggy S. Worthen, wife of BYU president Kevin J. Worthen, delivered this devotional address on September 8, 2020.

Liv’s “heart-filled” messages could not have come at a better time for me. It was a very charitable act of service.

I appreciate Liv’s willingness to “submit” to Heavenly Father. Mosiah 3:19 reminds us of the importance of being “willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon [us].” I am not sure that the Lord necessarily inflicted the coronavirus on us, but I do know that He desires us to willingly turn to Him for His help when we face life’s challenges. When we turn to Heavenly Father, our faith increases—even amid life’s challenges. And when our faith increases, so does our courage to face the challenges.

The need to proceed with faith when faced with challenges and the way in which that faith increases our courage are both illustrated by the story of Caleb in the Old Testament book of Numbers. After the children of Israel had fled from Egypt, the Lord commanded Moses to select twelve men, including Caleb, to “search the land of Canaan [the promised land], which [God had promised to] give unto the children of Israel” (Numbers 13:2). “And Moses by the commandment of the Lord sent them . . . to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up . . . and go up into the mountain: And see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many” (verses 3, 17–18). Moses instructed the twelve men to find out all they could about Canaan and to be “of good courage, and bring [back] the fruit of the land” (verse 20).

The spies spent forty days searching out the land. Upon their return, they brought with them a “cluster of grapes” so large that two of the spies had to carry it on a rod between them (verse 23). They also brought back pomegranates and figs. “And [then] they went and came to Moses . . . and to all the congregation of the children of Israel . . . and brought back word unto them . . . and shewed them the fruit of the land” (verse 26). With this bounteous crop in hand, they told Moses and the congregation that the land “surely . . . floweth with milk and honey” (verse 27). However, despite the abundance they saw, ten of the spies were reluctant to proceed as God had commanded because “the people [are] strong that dwell in

the land, and the cities are walled, and very great” (verse 28). These faithless and fearful spies warned Moses and the congregation that they should not attempt to seize Canaan, even though God had promised the land to them. They feared the people—the Anakim, who were considered giants—who dwelt there because of their size and strength.

By contrast, the other two spies, Caleb and Joshua, courageously and faithfully tried to convince the congregation to go into Canaan, notwithstanding the large challenge that would pose. Caleb said, “Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (verse 30). Trying to calm the fears of the people, Caleb and Joshua stated, “If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it [to] us; a land which floweth with milk and honey” (Numbers 14:8). They also admonished the children of Israel to not rebel “against the Lord, neither fear . . . the people of the land . . . [because] the Lord is with us: fear them not” (verse 9).

The congregation became angry with Caleb and Joshua and wanted to stone them (see verse 10). Because of the faithlessness and fear of the congregation and the ten spies, the Lord declared, “Surely they shall not see the [promised] land. . . . But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it” (verses 23–24).

It would be forty-five years before Caleb would see this promise fulfilled, but he remained faithful and eventually was given an inheritance in the promised land of Canaan. At that point Caleb knew that there were still Anakim, the giants, in the land and that he would need to conquer them. But to this challenge Caleb stated, “Now therefore give me this mountain . . . : [for] if . . . the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the Lord said” (Joshua 14:12).

President Spencer W. Kimball said:

From Caleb’s example we learn very important lessons. Just as Caleb had to struggle and remain true and faithful to gain his inheritance, so we must remember that, while the Lord has promised us a place in his

kingdom, we must ever strive constantly and faithfully so as to be worthy to receive the reward. . . .

. . . There are great challenges ahead of us, giant opportunities to be met. I welcome that exciting prospect and feel to say to the Lord, humbly, "Give me this mountain," give me these challenges. ["Give Me This Mountain," Ensign, November 1979]

So here we are—fall semester 2020. A difficult but extraordinary time in which there are giants, or at least a giant-like virus in the land. Some days we may, like the ten spies, feel a bit of despair, sadness, and fear. Just as did those ten spies, we may feel that even though there is abundant fruit in the BYU field ahead, the challenges are just too great. However, if we, like Caleb, trust the Lord, we can meet these challenges with faith, courage, and even enthusiasm. We can say, "Give me that Stats 121 mountain" or that "pandemic mountain" or even that "awkward roommate mountain."

Let me suggest four things we can do to develop that Caleb-like faith and courage:

First, we need to always remember to turn to Heavenly Father and be willing to submit to Him. He loves us. He will help us. He will increase our faith and fill us with a brightness of hope.

Second, remember the importance of daily, meaningful scripture study. "When holy men of God write or speak by the power of the Holy Ghost, their words 'shall be scripture . . . , shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation'" (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Gospel Topics page, "Scriptures," churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/scriptures?lang=eng; quoting D&C 68:4). We learn from examples like Caleb's faithfulness through the scriptures.

Third, look for opportunities to serve. A kind word or deed or an envelope full of paper hearts may not only lift the recipient but be a miraculous healing balm for the giver.

Fourth, do not be afraid to share your difficult and extraordinary experiences with others. They can inspire and encourage you, and you will find that often you can inspire and encourage them.

I have great faith in you. More important, God has great faith in you. You are not here by chance. You have accomplished much already in your young lives. But you can do more—much more—if you will face your challenges with Caleb-like faith, courage, and optimism. That you may do so is my prayer for you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.